Lift Up Your Heart in Ramadan



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Introduction

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

All praise and thanks are due to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon His Messenger, his household, and those who followed his path until the Day of Judgment.

The month of Ramadan is here. To live and witness this blessed month is a great gift that we should all thank Allah for. It is also a unique chance to cleanse our hearts, to purify our souls, to amend our ways and to get spiritually recharged.

True believers realize the significance of this month and, therefore, they are keen on maximizing their rewards and benefits. In this refreshing, spirit-nurturing atmosphere, Onislam.net presents this e-book, Lift Up Your Heart in Ramadan, a selected collection of articles that care for your heart and soul.

As many of us receive Ramadan with hearts hardened with the temptations of *dunya* and the sins and mistakes we accumulated throughout the year, chapter one of this book seeks to revive and soften these hearts, providing reminders about *taqwa* in Ramadan, effects of sin, Allah's Mercy, and the inevitable moment of death.

Story is a very effective tool to drive points home. Chapter two, Born Again, recounts stories of people who went off the track but Allah's Mercy helped them get back. Each story has its own circumstances and context, but you cannot fail to notice the influence of Qur'an and



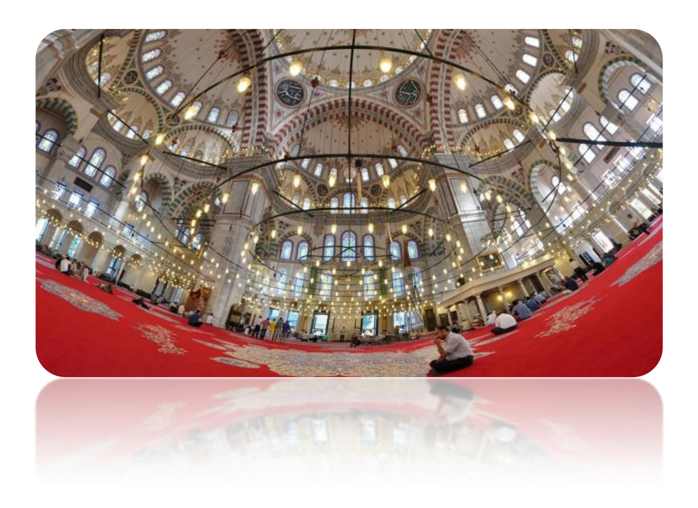
prayers in these stories, both of which are important elements of Ramadan's unique experience.

Through your journey to develop yourself and revive your heart, you are bound to face some obstacles and encounter dangerous pitfalls. Chapter three alerts you to some of these obstacles.

And finally, chapter four provides food for your soul. It features tips on how to have an interactive experience with the Qur'an and how to be in a continuous state of Dhikr throughout your life. Reflections on the huge rewards offered for certain small acts and the special status of prayer are also included.

We ask Allah Almighty to accept this humble effort, to make Ramadan a point of departure for our readers to a better, righteous life.

OnIslam Shari`ah Team




Chapter One
Revive Your Heart

Taqwa in Ramadan

By Dr. Muzammil H. Siddiqi

{O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may attain *Taqwa*.} (Al-Baqarah 2:183)

{O ye who believe! fear Allah as He should be feared, and die not except in a state of Islam.} (Aal `Imran 3:102)

"Every deed of the child of Adam is for him except fasting; it is for Me and I shall reward it. The (bad) breath of the mouth of a fasting person is more pleasing to Allah than the perfume of musk."(Al-Bukhari)

The purpose of fasting is not to make us hungry and thirsty, or to deprive us some of our comfort and conveniences. The real purpose of fasting is that we learn *taqwa*.

Taqwa is highly emphasized in the Qur'an and Sunnah. There are more than 158 verses in the Qur'an on *taqwa*, and there are hundreds of haditbs on this subject. *Taqwa* is Islam itself. It is the sum total of all

Islamic values and virtues. If one has *taqwa* one has achieved everything.

Taqwa is the consciousness of Allah. It is to do one's best efforts to live by His commands and to avoid His prohibitions. The Qur'an has used the word *taqwa* to mean consciousness of Allah, fear of Allah, worship of Allah, sincerity in faith, and avoidance of disobedience to Allah.

Fasting builds the character of *taqwa* if it is done in the right way. How does fasting build the character of *taqwa*? Let us look at some of the things that a fasting person is supposed to do, and see how they are related to the concept and spirit of *taqwa*.

1. Unlike prayers, charity, and pilgrimage, fasting is an invisible act. Only Allah and the person who is fasting know whether he or she is fasting or not.

One may quietly eat or drink something and no one will notice and no one can find out. However, the fasting person has made this commitment for the sake of Allah and he or she wants to guard the purity of his or her fast for the sake of Allah.

Fasting thus teaches sincerity, and it helps a person learn to live by the principles of his or her faith regardless whether others know or do not know. This is the very purpose and essence of *taqwa*.

2. Food and sex are two needs and desires that are essential for human survival and growth, but they can become easily corruptive and disruptive if they are not properly controlled and disciplined. *Taqwa* requires observing the rules of Allah when one eats and when one

enjoys sexual relations. Fasting teaches how to control and discipline these desires.

3. The world is full of temptations. It takes a lot of discipline to say “no” to something that is very tempting but not good for us. During fasting we learn how to say “no” to things that are otherwise permissible and good, but are forbidden during fasting. When one learns how to say “no” to that which is generally permissible, then one can easily control oneself to avoid that which is forbidden. This is the spirit of *taqwa*.

4. People generally care for themselves and their families, but they often ignore the needs of others. Those who have do not even feel the pain and suffering of those who are hungry, homeless, and living in poverty.

Through fasting we taste—to some extent—the pain and suffering of those who are poor and destitute. Fasting teaches empathy and sympathy, and it takes away some of our selfishness and self-centeredness. This is the spirit of *taqwa*.

5. When Muslims fast together in the month of Ramadan, it builds an atmosphere of virtues, brotherhood and sisterhood. We come closer to our Creator and we also come closer to each other. Unity, peace, harmony, brotherhood and sisterhood are the fruits of *taqwa*. In Ramadan we enjoy these fruits as we grow in *taqwa*.

How to achieve *taqwa* in Ramadan

There are some important things that we should do during Ramadan to take better advantage of this month and to achieve its real purpose, namely, *taqwa*. These are some reminders and they are all taken from the guidelines given to us in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

1. *Niyyah* (intention): Remind yourself again and again that you are fasting in obedience to Allah. Be sincere in your intention. You want Allah to accept your fasting. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

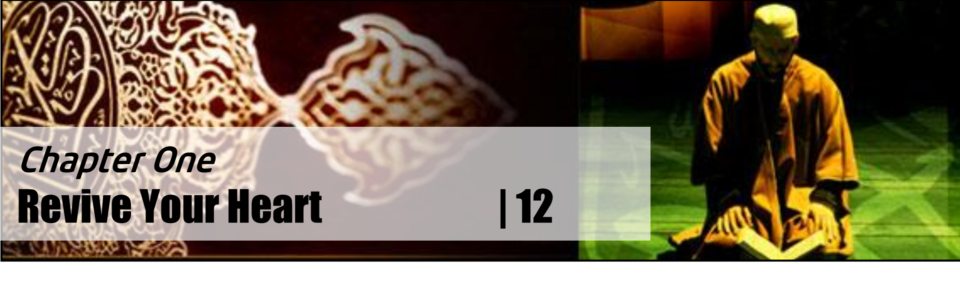
> **"Whosoever fasts in Ramadan with faith and seeking Allah's reward, all his past sins will be forgiven."**(Al-Bukhari)

2. Sunnah: Observe the Sunnah in fasting. Take the *sahur* meal a little before dawn and end your fast at sunset. Observe all the rules of fasting.

3. *Wara'* (avoiding everything *haram* or *makruh*): Be conscious to have *halal* food, *halal* income, *halal* relations. Avoid watching bad TV programs, videos, movies, etc., always, but especially during this month. Keep your body and mind very clean. Avoid wasting your time in useless things and pursuits.

4. Qur'an: Spend more time with the Qur'an. Read Qur'an every day. Try to finish the whole Qur'an at least one time during this month in your own personal reading. Read some Hadith and the books of *seerah*.

5. Prayer, supplication, and remembrance of Allah: Pray on time and observe all Prayers. Do not ignore the Tarawih Prayers. Make more



supererogatory prayers. Do as much worship as you can. Do more *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) and *du`aa'*(supplication) for yourself and for others.

Make *tawbah* (repentance) and *istighfar*(request for Allah's forgiveness) as much as you can. This is the best time for devotion and seeking Allah's forgiveness. Seek the Night of Qadar by special devotion during the last 10 nights of this month.

6. Zakah, charity, and generosity: Be very charitable and generous. Give more and more to help the poor and needy, and to help good social and community projects. Be good to your friends and neighbors also. Let your non-Muslim neighbors and co-workers know that this is your blessed and sacred time.

7. Good behavior and relations with others. Try to be extra kind and courteous during this month. Forget your quarrels and disputes. Reconcile and forgive. Do not get involved in backbiting, lying, cheating, and anything that is wrong. Be very good to Muslims and to all human beings.

8. Reflection: Think, reflect, and plan to improve the moral and spiritual condition of your own self and your family. Think about any wrong things and sins you may have been doing and correct yourself. Think about any deficiencies you have in your Islamic observances and plan to change yourself. Think what you can do for the Ummah and for humanity to make this world a better place for everyone.

It is reported in the Bible that the Children of Israel used to fast, but they complained to their prophet that they were not receiving God's

blessings. God was not answering their prayers. It is reported that God revealed to His prophet:

> "Why have we fasted, and thou seest it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and thou takest no knowledge of it?" Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high.
>
> Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, Here I am. (Isaiah 58:3-9)

May Allah help us to take full benefit of fasting in this blessed month of Ramadan. May He keep us on the right path and bless us now and always. Ameen!

Excerpted, with some modifications, from: http://www.pakistanlink.com



I Often Think When I Might Sin (Poem)

By Cynthia Heraud



I often think when I might sin,

What if the Angel would come to me then?

Would I want to be risen doing that sin?

I often think quietly to myself,

Where will I go, oh, where will I go,

When the Angel comes to me?

What if the Angel comes at night,

With a command from Allah to take my soul?

Where will I run, oh, where will I run?

What if the Angel comes to me when I'm driving my car?

Can I lock my doors, so the Angel can't get in?

Where will I hide, oh where will I hide?

I often think when I might sin,

What if the Angel would come to me then?

Would I want to be risen doing that sin?

I often think quietly to myself,

Where will I go, oh where will I go,

When the Angel comes to me?

What if the Angel comes in the middle of tea?



Maybe I can plead for a later return.

How will I plead, oh, how will I plead?

What if the Angel comes to me when I'm watching TV?

Can I beg to the Angel for a little more time?

How will I beg, oh how will I beg?

I often think when I might sin,

What if the Angel would come to me then?

Would I want to be risen doing that sin?

I often think quietly to myself,

Where will I go, oh, where will I go?

When the Angel comes to me?

Excerpted from www.islamweb.net

Accept Allah Into Your Life

By Kamal Badr

Editor-in-Chief, OnIslam.net



This is the message of peace, the message of salvation. This is the message of liberation from being enslaved to mundane things that keep shackling souls with worries and sorrows.

This is a call from the One Who controls everything, calling you, humankind, to submit!

Submit your life to Him and be calm. Make your motto of life *La ilaha illa Allah* (There is no god but Allah). By this motto, you testify to your incapacity as a creature provided with limited faculties. You testify that everything in the universe belongs to Him and whatever He wants will come to pass in the way and the time He wants. You testify to your being created by Him in the way He wants:

> {**He it is Who shapes you in the wombs as He likes; there is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise.**} (Aal `Imran 3:6)

But despite His absolute power to do everything in anyway He likes, what we notice is that out of His infinite mercy He made everything perfect, created you and all what you see around you in the most beautiful way that we all behold:

> {**He has created the heavens and the earth in just proportions, and has given you shape and made your shapes beautiful: And to Him is the final Goal.**} (At-Taghabun 64:3)

> {**No want of proportion will you see in the Creation of (Allah) Most Gracious. So turn your vision again: See you any flaw? Again turn your vision a second time: (Your) vision will come back to you dull and discomfited, in a state worn out.**} (Al-Mulk 67:3-4)

Due to His mercy the abnormalities are subject to the law of rarity; that is, ever since the creation of Heaven and earth and the creation of Adam up to the present day, there is not any irregularity in the pattern of creation, and whatever few abnormalities that we see are also subject to His divine wisdom. Despite all the constant recklessness of humankind, painful consequences never occur in a proportional measure, *subhan* Allah (glory be to Allah)! Compared to the high rate of speed-limit violations, how many accidents occur daily? Very few! Actually, His mercy exceeds His wrath.

> {**Whatever misfortune happens to you is because of the things your hands have wrought, and for many (of them) He grants forgiveness**.} (Ash-Shura 42:30)



Another point here is, your testifying to Allah's almighty power is an explicit recognition of your limit as a human being. By pronouncing the words "*la ilaha illa Allah*," you are actually surrendering your limited power to the mighty Lord of unlimited power; you submit your will to Him. This is Islam.

But this attestation can never be genuine if it is not accompanied by love, because faith without love is dead. If you do not love Him, you will not genuinely obey Him. This is different from relationships between mortals where hypocrisy can prevail, making it hard to distinguish between genuine and fake love. But with Almighty Allah everything is transparent, so when we talk about this highest degree of love we talk about something that is not tainted with any hypocrisy or deceit.

So the true and genuine Shahadah in Islam is the one coated with love: loving Allah, which of course is the sublime love. This love will automatically make it easier to show full obedience to His commands:

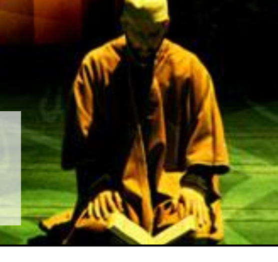
> {**Say: If you love Allah, then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you your faults**} (Aal `Imran 3:31).

Thus you will find yourself spontaneously pronouncing the phrase "*Muhammad Rasul Allah*" (Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah) which is the second part of Shahadah in Islam.

Then bit by bit you will find yourself on a very smooth spiritual path whereby the relationship you have developed with Allah will direct light into your heart, melting away darkness. Thus the phrase "*la ilaha illa Allah*" will echo in all what you do, what you see, what you hear, etc. That is, it will develop into a conviction in your innermost self,



reassuring you that it is through His command and wishes that everything happens. Hence this conviction is *iman* (faith) reposing in your heart. Henceforth your manners will be in proportional compatibility with that faith. That means you have accepted Allah into your life.



Living Like a Stranger

By Dr. Hazem Said and Maha Ezzeddine

`Abdullah bin `Umar narrated:

*The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) took hold of my shoulders and said, "**Be in this life as a stranger or a passerby.**" (Al-Bukhari)*



Imagine that we are all riding on an airplane. Some are sitting in first class while most of us are crammed in the back. We look forward to arriving at our destination, a beautiful resort where all will enjoy themselves regardless of where they sat on the plane.

Some people, however, think that the airplane is all there is to the vacation. They fight over the bags of peanuts and envy those in better seats. They get mad at their fellow passengers for ruining the trip one way or another, since this is their only chance at a vacation. They forget that it is only a few hours of patience and discomfort before the airplane lands. When we become too enveloped in this world, it is as if we are making the airplane trip the whole vacation instead of waiting until we arrive at an eternal, majestic place.

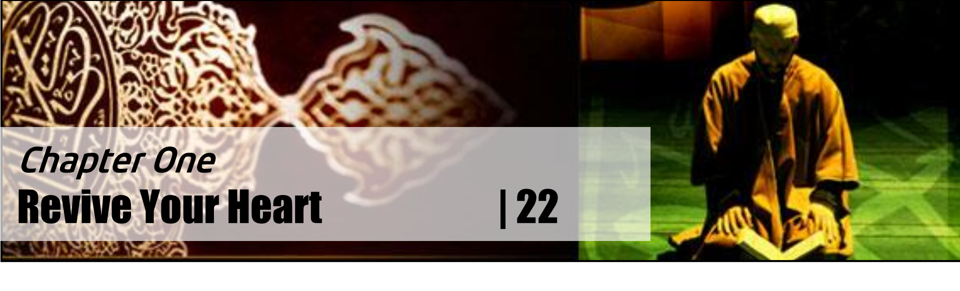
This world is simply a means to an end. It will fly by so quickly that you will look back at it and think it was only a few hours or a day.

Because this world was not meant to satisfy our deepest longings, the Prophet tells us to pass through it purposefully without becoming too distracted. Like a stranger or a passerby, we walk through the earth with a sense of purpose, towards a clear destination, without getting sidetracked.

Whether God has written that we would be entrusted with a great deal of wealth, beauty, or influence, or whether He has written that we go through life with very little, it truly does not matter because we are only passing through on our way to another place.

That is not to say that the journey does not matter. It matters tremendously! How we utilize what we have been entrusted with, or how patient we are with our smaller portion, will determine how great our place in the next world will be. All material things in this life are meant as tools to people to work hard towards the pleasure of God. We have to work hard, not in accumulating stuff to enjoy or to show off to others, but in utilizing what we have been given and the opportunities before us to please God.

One of the dangers of becoming too attached to this world is that we lose sensitivity to the blessings God has given us. When we grow permanent roots on this earth, we become frustrated by the lack of contentment material things give us. So we accumulate more and more, trying to fill that emptiness with friends, addictions, or new things. We become blind to what we do have, and we lose our sense of gratitude. Focused on our next material goal, we hope it will fulfill our need for



completion. But it does not, because we were not created to exist in this life for very long. We are only passing through.

Being a stranger or a passerby in this life is a path to peace. When we set our eyes on God instead of busying our hearts with the details of accumulating more and more in this life, we can live our lives free of anxiety and competing with others. We can forgive and let things go more easily. We can be more generous with what we have and we can be more patient in times of difficulty. We have a stronger ability to nurture the intangible things in this life that matter most such as compassion, humility, gratitude, and God-consciousness. And we appreciate those things more in other people.

When we understand that this whole world is equal to less than a fly's wing in the sight of God, we see that it is too worthless to drain our energy and youth in its pursuit. Instead, we set our eyes on our real home, our final destination, where we truly belong and where we will find the answers to our deepest, most cherished longings. This life is just a journey to that place, and living with that knowledge will bring us deep, contented peace.

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Facing the Reality of Death

By Khurram Murad

Allah has created everything with a fixed life span. The Qur'an states:



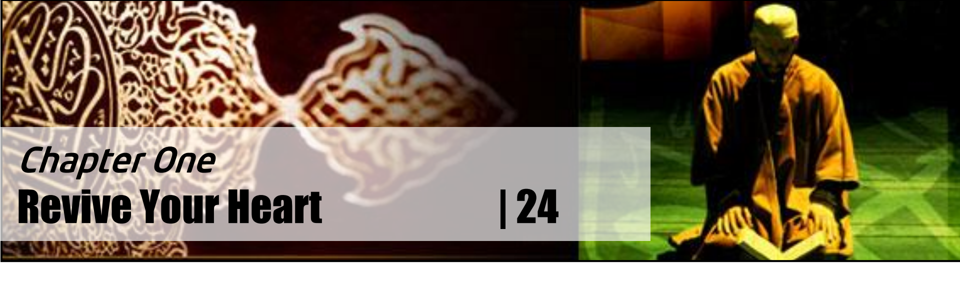
> **{It is not given to any soul to die save by Allah's permission, and at an appointed time. }** (Aal `Imran 3: 145.)

> **{Indeed there is no certainty in life except death. Every soul will taste death.}** (Aal `Imran 3:185.)

> **Not only is death itself inescapable, but the place and the very day and hour of death have been forever fixed: {No person knows what he will earn tomorrow and no person knows in what land he will die.}** (Luqman 31: 34.)

> **{When the time arrives they cannot tarry a single moment nor can they go ahead.}** (An-Nahl 16: 61.)

In death, we are compelled to return to Allah. In life, however, we can choose to draw closer to Allah voluntarily by living our lives according to His will. In this way, we have the opportunity to meet Allah and gain His pleasure even before we leave this world.



Those who fail to use the bounties of Allah to earn His pleasure during this life, will forever regret their mistakes for the cessation of life brings the cessation of opportunities for redemption and salvation, as the Qur'an warns:

> **{When death comes to one of them, he says,**
>
> > **'My Lord, let me return, let me return to life, so that I may act righteously in whatever I have left behind'**
>
> **Nay, it is but a meaningless word he utters; for behind them now is the barrier of death until the day they shall be raised up.**
>
> **Then, when the Trumpet will be blown, no ties of kinship will remain between them that day, neither would anyone be able to take care of another.**
>
> **Then, they whose weight of good deeds is heavy in the balance will attain salvation.**
>
> **But, they whose weight is light in the balance, will have squandered their own lives. In Hell will they abide forever.}** (Al-Mu'minun 23: 99-103.)

Man's forgetfulness

Though death is certain, we tend to forget from time to time our meeting with our Lord. This forgetfulness, although part of human nature can make us stray from our true mission in life:

{If anyone withdraws himself from Allah's remembrance, Most Gracious, We appoint for him an evil one to be his intimate companion.}(Az-Zukhruf 43: 36)

Forgetfulness, however, can be overcome by remembering Allah in all of life's activities, as the Qur'an again declares:

{Those who fear Allah, when a thought of evil from Shaytan assaults them, bring Allah to remembrance -whereupon, lo! They see aright.} (Al-A`raf 7: 201.)

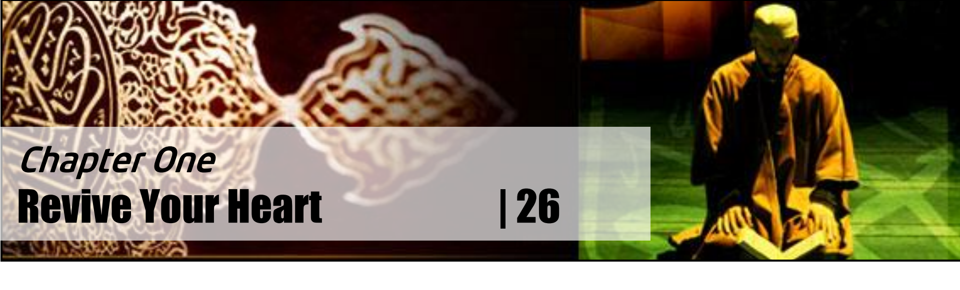
Additionally, we are urged in the Qur'an to make the following supplication:

{Our Lord take us not to task if we forget or make mistakes. Our Lord lay not upon us a burden like that which you laid on those before us.

Our Lord, make us not bear burdens which we have no strength to bear. Pardon us, and forgive us, and have mercy on us. You are our Lord Supreme: Help us against people who deny the truth.} (Al-Baqarah 2: 286)

Know that to fear death from which there is no escape is foolish. Having no fear of what is going to happen after death, though it is within our power to change it in our favour, is reckless. Allah reminds us in the Qur'an:

{Do not throw yourself into destruction with your own hands.} (Al-Baqarah 2: 195.)



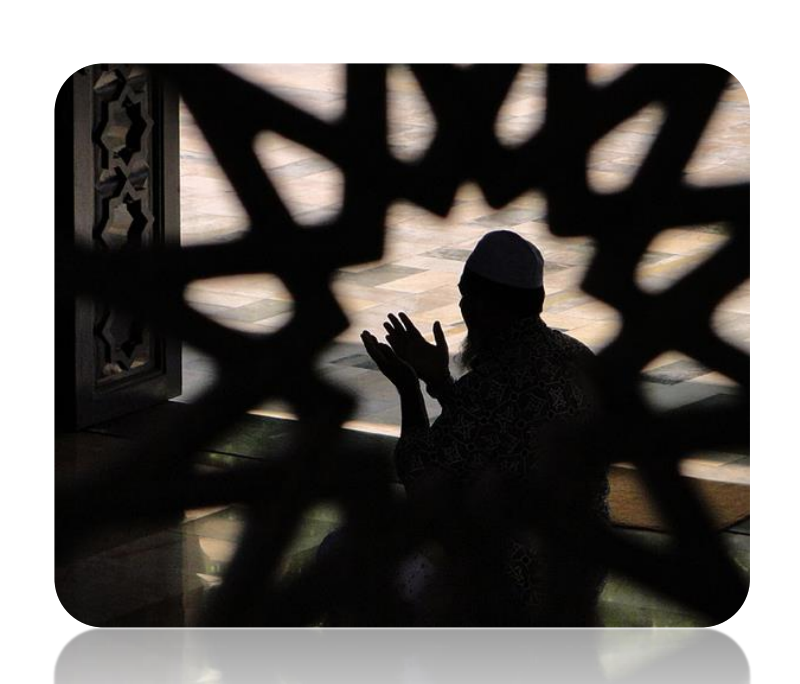
No effort to please Allah will be left unrewarded, while every effort made to seek the pleasures of this world will come to naught. Moreover, the Prophet reminded us that nothing will go with us to our graves except our deeds and that constant reminder of death will assist in keeping our indulgence in *Dunya* in perspective: **"Remember often the terminator of pleasures [i.e. death]".** (At-Tirmidhi.)

He also advised that we should take time to attend *janazah* or funeral prayers, as well as visit the graves of those who have made the transition into the Next-life, for these too will serve as reminders of our eventual fate.

Finally, one of the worst punishments the Qur'an describes is reserved for those who remain forgetful of Allah. On the Day of Judgment Allah will not speak to them. He will not even look in their direction. In this world they will claim to belong to Allah but they are heedless of His commands. On the Day that matters most, there will be a wall between them and Allah. His mercy and His compassion will be overflowing, but not for them.

> **{Behold those who barter away their bond with Allah and their pledges for a trifling gain - they shall not partake in the blessings of the life to come; and Allah will neither speak unto them nor will He cleanse them of their sins; and grievous suffering awaits them. }** (Aal `Imran 3: 77.)

Taken with slight modifications from the book: "In the Early Hours: Reflections on Spiritual and Self"



Chapter Two

Born Again (Repentance Stories)

Tawbah in a Taxi Trip

By Abdullah Ash-Sherif

I used to work as a taxi driver in the period between 2004 and 2008 as a temporary work until I could find another job.



One day, while driving in the streets of Alexandria, Egypt, and listening to the voice of Sheikh Mishari Ar-Rashid reciting some verses of Surat Al-Hadid (Qur'an, Chapter 57) a man in his 60s stopped me and asked to take him to Karmuz (one of the oldest neighborhoods in Alexandria.) He got into the car and I started driving to his destination.

Though focusing on the road, I noticed that the man was overly irritated. He was shaking his knees, rubbing his hands and looking to the cassette player from time to time. He kept doing that until the Sheikh recited the following Ayah:

> **{Has the time not come for those who have believed that their hearts should become humbly submissive at the remembrance of Allah and what has come down of the truth?**

And let them not be like those who were given the Scripture before, and a long period passed over them, so their hearts hardened; and many of them are defiantly disobedient.} (Al-Hadid 57:16)

Here the story really started!

The man burst into tears all of a sudden and cried hysterically. He never stopped so I had to stop the car at the road side to calm him down. I talked to him but he never replied; he just went on crying and weeping.

I thought that the Qur'an recitation was the reason for his crying so I turned off the cassette player. However, the old man asked to replay the last verse. When I did, he started wailing again.

I had to with until the Sheikh finished the Surah. Only then, the man started to calm down and tell his story:

Excuse me my dear son. My name is Mus`ad, I had a heart disease and my sons used to rush me to our neighbor doctor when I had a heart attack at night. One night, I had the attack and we went to him as usual, but he pretended to be asleep and never opened the door for us.

So, my children took me to a public hospital and as you know, no real care is offered in public hospitals. Anyway, I told my children that I was getting better. Actually, I just wanted them to go home because they had work in the morning and they could not afford missing the work.

After we got home, the pains were so acute. I felt so sick. So, I left my home and sat at the side of the Mahammadyah (an old water canal in Alexandria).



For hours, I kept praying to Allah and earnestly asking Him to heal me from this heart disease. I erupted in tears and said,

"O Allah, You make me suffer because I don't pray, please, heal me and I won't leave a Rak`ah anymore."

My pains increased more. I cried in a higher tone, "Stop it! Don't You feel sorry for me?!"

A while later, I felt a bit at ease and went to sleep. When I woke up, I felt I was much better.

Since that day, I have never experienced that pain or heart crisis anymore.

But I have never prayed even one Rak`ah.

When you played this recitation, I felt that Allah, the Almighty, was speaking to me. He was reprimanding me for my negligence of praying.

Do you think that I was crying because I feared that He would afflict me with heart disease?

No, By Allah, I was not! I just felt embarrassed and ashamed of myself. Allah fulfilled my wish but I never kept my word.

The story is taken and translated into English form the author's Facebook page.

Repentance of Makkah Holy Mosque Imam

By Shari`ah Staff

Editor's note: Sheikh `Adel Al-Kalbani was an imam of different Masjids in Saudi Arabia for decades and a former Imam of Tarawih prayer in Al-Masjid Al-Haram, Makkah. This story, recounted by him, has been first published in the book series, al-`a'idun ila Allah (The Returners to Allah) by Sheikh `Abdul-`aziz Al-Misnid. It is translated into English by OnIslam.net



I was not such a bad deviant… sure, there were major sins and minor slips that I committed, which were induced first by my own whimsical desires, and then by my family and my community. No one ever ordered me to offer prayer, and I never joined a session for memorization of the Glorious Qur'an.

Like all other children, I lived my childhood frolicking and rejoicing, hanging out in the streets after school, going for picnics and spending the nights watching TV. Of course, a person whose childhood is like



that surely grows into a youth who loves amusement, joy, merrymaking and the like. Well, this happened to me.

Beginning of the Guidance Journey

I apologize for not elaborating on details, and I would like to shift to the beginning of my getting closer to Allah.

One day, I drove my mother to one of her friends. Waiting for her in my car, I turned on the radio, and by chance the indicator came upon the Qur'an station. The melodious recitation of Qur'anic verses stroke a chord with me. It was the first time I heared those verses;

> **{And the stupor of death will bring Truth (before his eyes): "This was the thing which thou wast trying to escape!"}** (Qaf 50:17-29)

The reciter was the late Sheikh Muhammad Siddiq al-Menshawi (may Allah shower him with mercy), and the recitation was highly touching. It is true that I did not fully repent immediately upon hearing these verses; yet, it constituted the first step towards my guidance.

Obsessive Thoughts of Death

That year was the year of death; numerous luminous politicians and singers died. The premonition of death kept haunting me until it almost drove me crazy. I would wake up in panic, and almost

remained sleepless, falling asleep only when overwhelmed with exhaustion.

[To stop these fears,] I kept reciting all kinds of supplications (*du`aa'*) and sought all ways to dispel such a premonition, but it kept haunting me. I started to perform prayers on time which I was negligent of in the past. However, the obsessive fear of death was so extreme that sometimes I was unable to even pray and sometimes it caused me to disrupt my Salah.

[The question persisted,] how could I escape death! How to avoid it!

Then, I found only one resort; to run away toward Allah.

Who is Allah! He is my Lord. So, I should know Him well.

I thus started to contemplate on the Day of Judgment, resurrection and gathering unto Allah, the sky containing great stars, the sun and its brightness, and the moon when it follows it.

I used to read much. A that time I had [a special] love for Allah's Book even when I was astray. You would wonder when you known that I memorized some Qur'anic surahs in places where the name of Allah was never mentioned.

I spent this critical period, which amounted to several years, in such a state until I started to roll up my sleeves and firmly believe that there is no refuge from Allah except in Him, and that death is undoubtedly approaching. So, let one get ready for it,



{O ye who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared, and die not except in a state of Islam.} (Al-`Imran 3:102)

Qur'an: Key to Guidance

At the early stage of my guidance, I developed a genuine link with the Noble Qur'an. So, whenever I prayed behind an Imam with attractive recitation or who recited verses that touched me, I would immediately return home and start memorizing those verses.

Later on, I was appointed as an imam of Salahuddin Masjid, in Sulaymaniyya, and I led the people in Tarawih Prayer, in Ramadan, 1405 A.H., reciting from the Qur'an book during prayer. Then, when the month came to an end, I committed myself to memorizing the Qur'an by heart through the following year, drawing on Allah's support.

I set a schedule for memorizing the Qur'an, which started by the dawn of the 10th of Shawwal, 1405 A.H. and continued until the midst of Jumadal al-Akhirah, 1406 A.H. During that period, I memorized the Glorious Qur'an entirely, all praise and thanks are due to Allah for that.

By that time, I found it hard for me to keep awake after Fajr prayer (I was then used to sleeping after Fajr), though after a while Almighty Allah helped me to overcome such an obstacle through perseverance and patience. I sometimes fell asleep with the Qur'an on my chest (during recitation). Through persistence, diligence and earnestness, I now cannot fall asleep after Fajr at all.

Afterwards, Allah guided me to test and verify my recitation and memorization of the Qur'an before Sheikh Ahmad Mustafa Abu Hussayn, lecturer at the Faculty of Usul-ud-Din (Theology), Riyadh, who gave me an *Ijazah* (certificate of mastering Qur'an recitation).

This is my story with the Glorious Qur'an, and my advice to whoever seeks well-being to memorize the Qur'an.

A Final Advice

Here, I would like to highlight the responsibility of the family in raising children, besides the responsibility of the community and the individual himself for contemplation and quest for truth and acting upon it.

I would also like to refer to the importance of the Qur'an, the great Book, that is printed in millions of copies, with hundreds of recordings of it circulated. If you want good in this life and in the hereafter, you should memorize and act upon it.

By Allah, there is nothing about me that makes me worthy of leadership, fame or love of people who have not seen me. It is only the Qur'an that blessed me with all these privileges. How much insignificant a person I would have been if I had not memorized the Glorious Qur'an.

Whenever I recall this fact, I cannot stop tears from trickling down my cheeks, and I then turn to Almighty Allah, invoking Him to make the



Qur'an my close companion upon my death, in the grave and when I shall be resurrected to stand for reckoning before my Lord.

I ask Him to make me among those who are told "**Recite and rise in status, recite as you used to recite in the world, for your status will be at the last verse that you recite.**"

The Light of Guidance

By Ahmad ibn `Abd Ar-Rahman As-Swiyaan

I was coming back from a long journey and Allah decreed that my seat in the airplane should be beside a group of carefree young men whose loud laughter and voices were excessive, and the air was filled with clouds of smoke from their cigarettes. By the wisdom of Allah, the plane was completely full and I could not change my seat.



I tried to escape from the problem by sleeping but it was impossible. When I got fed up with their noise, I took out my copy of the Qur'an, and started to read what I could in a soft voice. Soon after that these young men started to become quiet. Some of them started to read newspapers and others fell asleep.

Suddenly one of them said in a loud voice, even though he was sitting right next to me, "Enough! Enough!"



I thought that I had disturbed him because my voice was too loud, so I apologized to him and carried on reading in a whisper that only I could hear. I saw him holding his head in his hands, then fidgeting in his seat, and moving a lot. Then he raised his head and said to me angrily, "Please, stop it, I can't stand it!!"

Then he got up from his seat and went away for a while, then he came back, greeted me with salaams, and apologized. He fell silent and I did not know what was going on. But after a while he turned to me with his eyes full of tears and said to me in a whisper, "For three years or more I have not put my forehead on the ground, and I have not read even one *ayah*!"

For a whole month I have been on this trip, and there is no evil action that I did not indulge in. Then I saw you reading Qur'an and my world turned black and my heart was filled with despair. I felt as if someone was strangling me. I felt every *ayah* that you read coming down on my body like a whip.

I said to myself, "For how long will this negligence go on? Where will this path lead you? What will happen after all this foolish play?" Then I went to the washroom, do you know why?

I had the strong urge to weep and I could not find anywhere else to hide from the people's sight!

I spoke to him in general terms about repentance and turning back to Allah, then he fell silent.

When the plane landed he stopped me and it seemed that he wanted to keep away from his companions. He asked me with a serious expression on his face, “Do you think that Allah will accept my repentance?” I said, “If you are sincere and serious in your repentance, then Allah will forgive all your sins.”

He said, “But I have done terrible things, very terrible.”

I said, “Have you not heard what Allah says:

> { **Say: O My servants! who have acted extravagantly against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah; surely Allah forgives the faults altogether; surely He is the Forgiving the Merciful?**} (Az-Zumar 39: 53)

I saw him smiling with joy. His eyes filled with tears then he bade me farewell and left.

No matter how great a man's evil and sin, in his heart there is a seed of goodness. If only we can reach it and make it grow, it will bear fruit *in sha' Allah*.

This seed of goodness is always fighting in man's heart, even when it is covered with layers of whims and desires. When Allah wills good for His slave, He causes **the light of guidance** to shine in his heart and guides him to the path of those who are guided. Allah says:

> {**Therefore (for) whomsoever Allah intends that He would guide him aright, He expands his breast for Islam, and (for) whomsoever He intends that He should cause him to err, He makes his breast strait and narrow as though he were**



ascending upwards; thus does Allah lay uncleanness on those who do not believe.} (Al-An`am 6: 125)

From Al-Bayaan magazine, issue # 152, Rabee' al-Aakhir 1421, pp. 66-67.

The True Treasure (Repentance Story)

By Muhammad Abduh Mughawiri



A burglar scaled the wall of Malik ibn Dinar's house one night and easily managed to get inside. Once inside the house, the thief was disappointed to see that there was nothing inside actually worth stealing. The owner of the home was inside at the time, he was busy performing prayer. Realizing that he was not alone, Malik quickly ended his prayer and turned around to face the thief. Without showing any sign of being shocked or afraid, Malik calmly extended greetings of peace and then said,

My brother, may Allah forgive you. You entered my home and found nothing that is worth taking, yet I do not want you to leave my home without taking away some benefit.

He stood up, went to another part of the room, and came back with a jug full of water. He looked into the eyes of the burglar and said,

Make ablution and perform two units of prayer, for if you do so, you will leave my home with a greater treasure than you had initially sought when you entered it.



Much humbled by Malik’s manners and words, the thief said, "Yes, that is a generous offer indeed."

After making ablution and performing two units of prayer, the burglar said,

O Malik, would you mind if I stayed for a while, for I want to stay to perform two more units of prayer?

Malik said, "Stay for whatever amount of prayer Allah decrees for you to perform now."

The thief ended up spending the entire night at Malik’s house. He continued to pray until the morning. Then Malik said, "Leave now and be good."

But instead of leaving, the thief said, "Would you mind if I stayed here with you today, for I have made an intention to fast the day?"

"Stay as long as you wish," said Malik.

The burglar ended up staying for a number of days, praying during the late hours of each night and fasting throughout the duration of each day. When he finally decided to leave, the burglar said, "O Malik, I have made a firm resolve to repent for my sins and for my former way of life."

Malik said, "Indeed, that is in the Hand of Allah."

The man did mend his ways and began to lead a life of righteousness and obedience to Allah. Later on, He came across another burglar he knew. [His friend] said to him, "Have you found your treasure yet?"

He said,

My brother, what I found is Malik ibn Dinar. I went to steal from him, but it was he who ended up stealing my heart. I have indeed repented to Allah, and I will remain at the door [of His Mercy and Forgiveness] until I achieve what his obedient, loving slaves have achieved. (*Al-Mawaa'idh wal-Majalis*: 85)

Excerpted, with some modifications from Stories of Repentance, compiled by Muhammad Abduh Mughawiri, retrieved from
http://www.kalamullah.com/repentance.html



Chapter Three

Obstacles and Pitfalls

Never Say 'Soon'

By Abu Iyad

One of Satan's favorite tricks is to make people think and say, "I will do such-and-such soon", "in a little while", "maybe tomorrow", or "next week" and so on. He makes them delay their actions making them feel secure and happy with the present. Some people have named this "The Great Obstacle."



A person may place in front of himself a matter such as studying, then he says, "When I have finished studying, then I will repent, learn my religion and practice it." When he finishes his studies, he says, "When I receive the job, I will repent". He does not. Then he says, "When I have performed Hajj", "When I am married," and so on.

He is constantly putting obstacles in front of himself, delaying things, and delighting in his current situation of ease and happiness. He continues in this way until he dies, and yet his real, true life has not even begun (that is, the life of faith and righteous actions).

What Satan really intends is to completely prevent you from pursuing your beneficial activity or at least to delay you from it.



For those who are righteous this is a great danger. Satan comes and whispers to one, "You are not worthy of studying Islamic knowledge or calling people to the religion. Wait a while until you have studied." Yet, we have been commanded to teach the meaning of even one verse of the Qur'an if that is all we know.

Ibn Al-Qayyim said:

> How many people of firm intent and resolution are there, whom Satan has delayed by causing them to say "soon." And how many strivers has he stopped.
>
> Maybe a scholar intends to return to his studies and Satan whispers to him: Relax for an hour. Satan does not cease his attempts to make laziness and inactivity beautiful and appealing to a person so that he keeps delaying his actions. He would say to the servant who worships at night: "Time does not stop! The night is long!" He continues with these whispers until the morning arrives and the servant has not even prayed.

So, take lesson from what Abu `Abdur-Rahman Al-Maghazili reports:

> There was a wise woman in Makkah who was much given to worship.One day her brothers came to her. She wept for a long time and then said,
>
> "My brothers! You are the pleasure of my eye, so depict the Day of Judgment in your heart's eyes and relate to yourselves the actions you have sent forth. Whatever you think to be accepted on that day, aspire and hope in your Master for its acceptance and perfect blessings in it. And whatever you

expect to be rejected on that day, then attend to correct it today. Do not be unmindful of your own souls."

Excerpted with some modifications from the book: Shaytaan: His Ways in Misleading. The Islamic Society at the University of Essex.

I Am Tired Now!

By Harun Yahya



Physical discomfort is one of the excuses people put forward for not following the religion of Allah. For example, a person who is unwilling to worship Allah claims to be ill when he is really perfectly healthy. He tries to use this to deceive himself and those around him, and fails to fulfill his responsibilities. Such a person should never forget that Allah knows everything.

No human act or thought is a secret from Allah the Almighty. Allah knows every thought that crosses a person's mind, everything he feels in his heart and everything which is hidden in his subconscious. As the Qur'an tells us, **{... Allah knows what your hearts contain.}** (Aal `Imran 3: 119)

However, although they are given the opportunity to earn Allah's approval and attain Paradise, people who are far removed from the morality of the Qur'an prefer to set aside their worship using illness as their excuse and follow their own selfish desires. In return for this insincerity, they will receive bitter torment in the Hereafter because the

excuses they offer for not carrying out Allah's instructions are dishonest.

For people who really do have physical ailments, a number of concessions are provided in the Qur'an. For example, fasting is one of the religious duties which Allah has made compulsory. Consequently, people are obliged to carry out this instruction. In the Qur'an, Allah tells us clearly about situations in which people may be exempt from this form of worship:

> **{Fasting is prescribed] for a specified number of days. But any of you who are ill or on a journey should fast a number of other days.}** (Al-Baqarah 2: 184)

A later verse, reminds us that He always wants ease for His servants:

> **{Allah desires ease for you; He does not desire difficulty for you. You should complete the number of days and proclaim Allah's greatness for the guidance He has given you so that hopefully you will be thankful.}** (Al-Baqarah: 185)

As can be seen from this example, there is always an easy way for those who believe sincerely in Allah because the religion of Allah is extremely simple. Allah does not want any difficulties for people who wish to live by His religion. It is Allah Who knows best what will be difficult for people and how to lighten their load, and in the Qur'an He tells us that He will not impose on anybody beyond the limit of his strength:

> **{Allah desires to make things lighter for you. Man was created weak.}** (An-Nisa' 4: 28)



{We do not impose on any self any more than it can stand. With Us there is a Book which speaks the truth. They will not be wronged.} (Al-Mu'minun 23: 62)

Most people behave very ungratefully in the face of Allah's compassion and blessings. Because of their attachment to worldly ambitions, they continually put forward one circumstance after another as excuses for not worshipping as they should. Of course, in doing so they are only deceiving and harming themselves because as we are told in the Qur'an, Allah is in need of nothing:

{If you are ungrateful, Allah is rich beyond need of any of you and He is not pleased with ingratitude in His servants. But if you are grateful, He likes it in you. No burden-bearer can bear another's burden. Then you will return to your Lord and He will inform you of what you did. He knows what the heart contains.} (Az-Zumar 39: 7)

Be careful; do not deny your position of servitude to Allah and make excuses. Do not even think about such insincerity. Do not forget that Allah knows an insincere excuse before it even crosses a person's mind, and while you are deceiving yourself, if you suddenly meet with the angel of death, you will never be able to return to the world to worship Allah no matter how much you may want to. In the Qur'an, Allah tells us of the regret that will be felt on the Day of Judgment by healthy and able people who avoided worship:

{...they are called on to prostrate, but they will not be able to do so. Their eyes will be downcast, darkened by debasement;

for they were called on to prostrate when they were in full possession of their faculties. (Al-Qalam 68: 42-43)

Taken with some modifications from the Book: Why Do You Deceive Yourself?

The Time Is Not Right

By Harun Yahya



In everyday life, people make time for any number of things. Even if they have to make other sacrifices, they will always manage to set aside time, especially when their own benefit is at stake. Moreover, if their circumstances prevent them from carrying out an advantageous task, they are quick to think about the situation and find ways of removing the obstacle. However, people usually do not show the same determination when it comes to observing their acts of worship.

You often meet people around you who present such excuses as, "I want to pray but I can't find the time," "I'm at school and I can't make time for prayers because I have to study," or "This is my summer house, I can't fast here." In the same way, you can also see lots of people who excuse their bad behavior by saying, "I want to be a patient person, but everything happens at once," or "I don't want to get angry but I'm in a very stressful environment."

In reality these people are not approaching the religion of Allah with sincerity because, as we have said before, they are capable of ignoring the time and their circumstances and coming up with all kinds of solutions when they stand to make a material gain, but when the

matter in question is the need for them to fulfill their responsibility to Allah, Who created them, they start complaining about difficulties right away.

Let us give a more concrete example to make this easier to understand. If someone receives an offer to set aside one hour a day for a job that pays a lot of money (let us say ten times his monthly salary), then whatever circumstances he is in, he accepts immediately. This person may be preparing for his university examinations or he may have another very important job to do at the same time. Whatever he may be doing, if necessary he sacrifices his sleep or cuts down on his leisure time but he does not put forward lack of time as a problem. Right away he rearranges his entire schedule to fit in with the well-paid work which has to be done. This is an undeniable truth that applies to most people.

If the person does not show the same determination in earning Allah's approval, this is insincerity and lack of conscience. Above all, the return a person will receive for his prayers is Paradise and the eternal mercy of Allah, a reward that cannot be compared with a few extra dollars received for a job of work.

However, most people are bewitched by the property and money they are striving to acquire, the credit cards they carry, the dollars they save and the houses, cars and fine clothes they enjoy, and they direct themselves to worldly pursuits, setting their religion aside and forgetting about the Hereafter. They deceive themselves by saying, "I do not have time," "I am very busy," "I have work I need to finish," "I have plans for the future," or "I will do it later," instead of devoting themselves to the worship which will gain a reward for them in the



Hereafter. They do not live according to the superior morality Allah teaches, they do not pray, nor do they fast. They do not give to the needy from the things Allah has given them and they waste their lives in the pursuit of worldly gain.

People who deceive themselves in the belief that the excuses they make will be accepted, and so either do not pursue their worship or put it off, are told what they will meet with in the Hereafter in the following terms:

{That Day man will be told what he did and failed to do. In fact, man will be clear proof against himself in spite of any excuses he might offer.} (Al-Qiyamah 75:13-15)

So be careful. Do not deceive yourself like these people by making excuses in this world that will be meaningless in the Hereafter. As we are told in the above verses, whatever excuses you make, you really have an intelligence that is capable of understanding that they are not acceptable. If you pursue the desires of the self, you will account for this to Allah, our Lord. No work which you have to do is more urgent or more important than this because your eternal salvation is possible only through Allah's mercy.

Taken with some modifications from the Book: Why Do You Deceive Yourself?

Addiction to Comfort

By Fethullah Gülen

Every noble cause and truth will gain constancy and a universal identity by its adherents' determination to protect it and their devotion to it.



If those who have embraced that cause and truth are not perceptive, faithful, and persevering, that which they have embraced eventually will be erased from human memory by the hostility of its determined enemies. Just as stagnant water stinks and putrefies upon losing its fluidity, the source of its life, so do those lazy people who abandon themselves to comfort and ease inevitably begin to rot and become losers.

Desire for comfort is the first alarm and sign of death. However, those whose sensitivity has been paralyzed cannot hear the alarm or understand the sign, and do not heed the warnings and advice of friends.

Laziness and attachment to ease are among the major reasons for deprivation and humiliation. Inactive people who have abandoned



themselves to (indolent) comfort one day will fall so low that they will expect even their basic necessities to be supplied by others.

Once the extreme addiction of staying at home is added to that of indolent comfort, the "front lines" will be abandoned and people will become cowardly. If this decline is not recognized, and the situation is not handled intelligently and properly, the result will be deviation and something horrid.

Those who leave the "front" because they are addicted to the comforts of their homes or their lust usually encounter the exact opposite of what they expected. They may even lose their nice homes and lovely children! How true is this accusation made by a mother to her son, a commander who did not fight courageously when he should have: "You did not fight like a man on the battlefield, so now at least sit and cry like a woman!"

For a human being, change and decay are usually slow and silent. Sometimes even a little heedlessness, a slight straying from the "caravan," can cause a complete collapse and a total loss. However, because those who have fallen see themselves as still on the same line and in the same situation, they do not realize that they have plunged to the bottom of a deep well from a minaret-like peak.

Some people who leave the line of exertion and struggle with a feeling of guilt, which every fugitive and truant is bound to feel, are likely to defend themselves and criticize their friends who continue to serve. It is almost impossible for such people to escape their deviation and return to their original line. Prophet Adam (peace be upon him)

recovered his previous rank with a single deed, namely his confession of fault, after he had fallen into forgetfulness. By contrast, Satan, despite the gravity of his sin, tried to defend himself and fell into eternal frustration.

People who have lost their resolve, willpower, and endeavour affect the courage and devotional strength of those around them. Sometimes only a little hesitation or a bit of reluctance displayed by an irresolute individual causes a shock and loss of hope as great as the death of a hundred people. Such a disaster only encourages the enemies of the nation to attack us.

The attractiveness of children, family, and worldly property is seductive and a burdensome trial. The successful defendants at this trial are those determined, resolute, strong-willed, and fortunate people who, every morning and evening, renew from the depth of their hearts their oath of attachment to the truth to which they have devoted themselves.

Taken with slight modifications from the Book: "Pearls of Wisdom"

Does One Person Matter?

By Wael Hamza



A few years ago at my son's middle school graduation ceremony, the school superintendent wanted to encourage the graduating students to seriously consider what they could add to society as they move further ahead in their educational journey. "Does one person matter?" he asked. And instead of continuing his speech, he made a demonstration, one that I will never forget. He showed a large glass jar full of water and an eyedropper. He then asked the students, "How many drops of water you think this jar contains?" After a few guesses from the students, he disclosed the answer, "2673 drops! I counted them myself this morning while filling the jar." Raising the eyedropper, he asked "Do you think another drop can make a difference to the water in the jar?" The kids confidently yelled, "No!"

This is exactly how we all feel. What can one person do? What would a drop of water add to a whole jar full of water? Would my small effort make a difference in this huge complex world?

Unlike the answer to the water drop question, answering 'no' to this personal question will result in a lazy, inactive life, a life lacking energy and achievement. Shaitan uses this tactic frequently to discourage people from doing good deeds, especially deeds that have wide-ranging effects. Shaitan challenges us with questions all the time: "Are you going to reform the world? How would you succeed while everyone who tried before you failed? What is so special about you? Do you think this small action will make a difference? People are completely astray; do you think you are a prophet to guide all of them?"

These and many similar questions are sufficient to disable any person from doing good, and can cause stagnation in reforming a society, especially when the task is huge and the challenges are so formidable.

In this article, we will elaborate more on this obstacle and try to understand the causes. We will also identify the spiritual power needed to overcome this problem and defeat all the tricks the Shaitan uses. We will share a few examples of how being proactive and making even modest effort can bring about great results. We will help the reader answer the question presented at the outset with a resounding, "Yes! one person matters… a lot!"

We hope that by the end of this article, you will be as excited as all the students at the school graduation were when the superintendent proved them all wrong. He added one extra drop to the jar, and the difference was so obvious that it drew loud applause from all the students and their parents. The drop changed the whole jar. Of course it did. It was a blue food-coloring drop!



{It is You Whom we worship and it is You Whom we ask for help} (Al-Fatihah 1: 5)

One of the major obstacles that feed the belief that we can't make a difference is underestimating one's potential. Doesn't Allah say, **{... And man is created weak.}**(An-Nisaa' 4:28)?

However, the believer finds power in Allah's support. With it, man can do wonders. It is not a surprise that we have to recite this verse at least seventeen times a day in our prayer:

> **{It is You whom we worship and it is You from whom we seek help.}** (Al-Fatihah 1: 5)

With Allah's support, our weakness is compensated for. The attitude of the believer when facing a great challenge is to flee to Allah and seek His help. Finding the task tremendous, when Moses (peace and blessings be upon him) was tasked to face Pharaoh he quickly sought Allah for help and support:

> **{He said, O My Lord, relieve my mind. And ease my task for me. And loosen the knot from my tongue so that they may understand my speech.}** (Taha 20:25-28)

Seeking Allah's support is the main source of confidence in one's ability and a huge comfort against challenges and obstacles. We should always remind ourselves,

{Surely We shall help our messengers and the believers in the life of this world and on the Day when witnesses will rise to testify.} (Ghafir 40:51)

It is part of our belief that it is Allah who makes things happen; results are in His Hands. Therefore, it is not our effort that makes great things happen. It is Him and He is capable of doing anything. We just have to show Him our commitment, and wonders will happen. We should always remind ourselves that neither Moses (peace and blessings be upon him) nor his stick could split the sea into two great mountains of water; but Allah the Almighty can.



"Do not belittle any good …" (Muslim)

Another obstacle is belittling small actions and not seeing their effect. Shaitan uses this strategy to make us ignore small deeds, both good and bad. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) warned us from small sins and mistakes as narrated by Ahmad, "**Beware of the sins you deem insignificant …**" He also directed our attention to the small good deeds that we deem insignificant: "**Do not belittle any good …**" (Muslim)

As small sins and mistakes accumulate to make us perish, small good deeds accumulate to make us flourish. The problem we all face is looking for immediate results from our actions, something that rarely happen with small actions.



Therefore, Allah and His Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) showed us the great effect of small deeds especially in the hereafter. The examples are numerous. Allah says in the Qur'an, {**Whoever does an atom's weight of good shall see it.**} (Az-Zalzalah 99:7) The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "**The servant of Allah says a word that please Allah, while paying no attention to it, Allah will elevate his degrees with it.**" And in describing how Allah grows the small charity of His servant, he (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "**... until the (small) charity becomes like a mountain.**" (Al-Bukhari)

Just as these small deeds have great reward in the hereafter, they also have great results in this life. Although we have our eyes on the hereafter, Allah may show us great results in this life as well:

- Recall the good advice given by the teacher of Imam Al-Bukhari to collect the authentic Hadiths of the Prophet in one book, for it resulted in the Authentic Book of Bukhari.

- Do not neglect investing in your son or daughter the way the mother of Imam Ahmed did until he became one of the great scholars of Islam.

- Do not belittle a suggestion similar to the one `Umar Ibn Al-Khattab made to compile the Qur'an, for it resulted in the preservation of the Qur'an until the Day of Judgement.

- Do not belittle a good word similar to the one made by the Prophet to At-Tufayl Ibn Amr while visiting Makkah, for it resulted in the belief of the whole tribe of Daws.

So, do not belittle any deed. Not only does one person count; even one action counts.



"Indeed Ibrahim was a community …" (An-Nahl 16:120)

This verse describes Prophet Ibrahim (peace and blessings be upon him) as a community (Ummah). Not only does it shed the light on how Ibrahim (peace and blessings be upon him) showed different aspects of morality and righteousness, but also conveys the meaning that he established a community. The community Ibrahim established was the community of monotheism, to which all prophets and messengers after him belonged.

But what great actions did Ibrahim (peace and blessings be upon him) do to be called a community? Many, the greatest of which was to initiate the community. Just being a Muslim and holding the message of Islam at his time made all of those who came after trace their identity to him and feel pride in belonging to him. Allah talking to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) says, {**Say, My Lord guided me to a straight path, the right religion, the way of Ibrahim…**} (Al-An`am 6:161)

When faced with great challenges, those who initiate good get the most honor. Do not get trapped in "what would one person do?" Instead, live by the spirit of, "Let me be the first one to do!" Remember that the master of the martyrs is the one who stands before a tyrant enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong.



Be like the first six people of Madinah to embrace Islam and bring it to their own city. Be like the first ambassador of Islam to a whole new city as Mus`ab ibn `Umair was to Madinah.

Be the one who starts, initiates, establishes, and hastens. If you do, you will get the reward of your actions and the actions of those who follow. Be among those who say, {**... and make us leaders of the God-conscious.**} (Al-Furqan 25:74)



{.... to be able to offer an excuse before Your Lord} (Al-A`raf 7:164)

A very common argument we use to abstain from doing good is, "there is no hope in what we are doing." The same argument was used by some of the Israelites when a group of them were enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. They were told, {**Why do you admonish a people whom Allah is about to destroy or punish severely?**} (Al-A`raf 7:164) They responded eloquently, {**They said, to be able to offer an excuse before Your Lord and they [the wrongdoers] may be conscious.**" (Al-A`raf 7:164)

Allah will ask us about the society around us. Allah will hold us accountable for the mischief we see every day. We are responsible for the corruption in the society even though we are not corrupt. We have to do something about it even if we think it may not work. If it does work, we celebrate the result. If it doesn't, we will have an excuse to present to Allah when He asks us about this responsibility: "O Allah,

we did our part, please excuse us and do not hold us accountable for what other people do!"



"... and they came out (of the cave) walking" (Al-Bukhari)

One important concept that will help to magnify the effect of our small deeds is the concept of intention. Purifying one's intention towards Allah has a tremendous effect. Small deeds, when done with the right, pure intention, have great effect in this life before the hereafter.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) tells us the story of three men who got trapped in a cave by a huge rock that blocked their way out. Despite their effort they weren't able to move it. After giving up on their human ability they turned to Allah to save them. Each one of them prayed. They all mentioned one good deed they offered in the past. Each concluded his story saying, "**O Allah, if you know that I did that for your sake, please relieve the difficulty we are in.**" (Al-Bukhari) The rock moved a bit with every prayer until "**... they came out of the cave walking.**" (Al-Bukhari)

Scholars use this authentic story to state that pure intention magnifies actions. Pure intention towards Allah can move rocks, change hearts, and reform societies. As`ad Ibn Zorarah told Mus`ab Ibn Umair when approached by great leaders of Madinah,



"Those are the leaders of their people. If they embrace Islam, many people behind them will believe. So, be truthful to Allah while talking to them!"

And Mus`ab was truthful and they believed and so did all their people.

One other subtle lesson from this great story is the importance of collective work. The rock moved completely when they, all, contributed to removing it by their good deeds. Yes, one person may not count, and may not be able to achieve a lot on his own. But a group of people whose intention is pure to Allah can do wonders. Allah says, {**Help one another in actions of righteousness and piety …**} (Al-Ma'idah 5:2)



{... and I came from Saba' with sure news} (An-Naml 27:22)

The hoopoe is a beautiful bird but it is not the only one that is beautiful. It does fly smoothly and with style but so do many other birds. It is not mentioned in the Qur'an because of all of that. It was its small action regarding the people who worshipped the sun. It was the hoopoe's proactive attitude towards the truth that made its name recited by billions of Muslims in the most honorable and authentic Book. It is its small effort that led a queen and her whole kingdom to believe in Allah with His Prophet Sulaiman (peace and blessings be upon him) (read An-Naml 27:20-44). Not only does one person count; Even a little bird does.

Dealing with People's Praise

By Dr. Jasser Auda

In his well-known book, *Al-Hikam*(Words of Wisdom), sheikh Ahmad Ibn `Ataa'illah As-Sakandari says:



> **When people praise you for what they assume about you, blame yourself for what you certainly know about yourself. The most ignorant is the one who denies what he really knows about himself and believes what others assume about him.**

While journeying to Allah Almighty we will be put to many tests. One of those tests pertains to people's praise for what they assume about us. This word of wisdom answers the following question: How does one deal with people's praise?

People's praise is a serious danger. A man praised another greatly before the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The Prophet said, "Woe on you! You have cut the neck of your friend". The



Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), repeated this sentence many times and said:

> **If you have to praise someone, then he should say, 'I think that he is so-and-so', if he really thinks that he is such. Allah is the One Who will take his accounts as He knows his reality and no-one can sanctify anybody before Allah.** (Reported by al-Bukhari)

In another tradition, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

> **When you see those who shower praise upon others, throw dust upon their faces.** (Reported by Muslim)

People's praise may change one's intentions from pleasing Allah to pleasing people, earning their praise or avoiding their criticism. It also discourages one to do more good deeds if he really believes that he is perfect and has done great actions. Another negative aspect of praise is that it makes one overlook his flaws and, instead, look at his merits.

In this word of wisdom, the Sheikh says: "When people praise you for what they assume about you, blame yourself for what you certainly know about yourself". People praise me based on assumptions about me and what they know from the outlook they see. But I know myself and my flaws better than others.

Remember that the Sheikh had said: "Trying to discover the flaws within you is better than trying to discover the worlds hidden from you". Now that you know many of your flaws, and if you are highly

praised by people, you should turn to yourself and blame it for the flaws you know. This will make you pray to Allah to forgive your sins and fix your flaws.

This reminds me again of Imam Ali’s great speech on the pious ones (may Allah be pleased be with him). He described the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) in that famous sermon as follows:

> "If someone praises one of them, he says, "I know myself better than others, and my Lord is more knowledgeable of me than myself. O Allah, don't take me to task for what they say, and make me better than what they think of me, and forgive me for those sins which they are unaware of".

According to Imam Ali's description, when someone praised one of the Prophet's Companions, he responded to him saying: "I know myself better than others [know me]". This is the same meaning given by Ibn `Ataa here. The Companion added: "And my Lord is more knowledgeable of me than myself", i.e. Allah is more knowledgeable of my flaws, sins, and mistakes than myself. Finally, the Companion ends his response by praying to Allah: "Make me better than what they think of me." They think good of me, so make me better than this. "O Allah, forgive me for those sins which they are unaware of".

Sometimes people's praise takes away the reward promised by Allah for a certain good deed. Because this praise is actually the reward that one was seeking, as his intention was not to please Allah, but to please people. This is hypocrisy, by definition.



The Sheikh says: "If the believer is praised, he should feel ashamed of Allah that people praise him for things which are not in him. The most ignorant is the one who denies what he really knows about himself and believes what others assume about him." Should I leave what I know for sure about myself and believe what people assume about me?

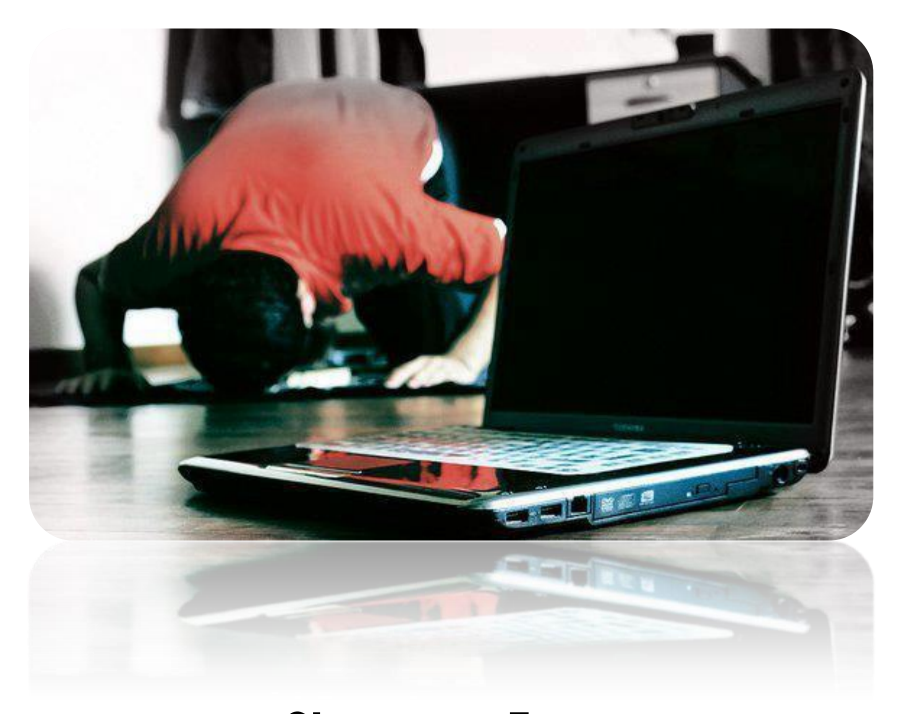
In some other cases, people's praise is glad tidings for the believer. Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased him) reported: It was said to Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): What is your opinion about the person who has done good deeds and the people praise him? He said:

"It is the immediate glad tidings for a believer". (Reported by Muslim)

The Qur'an mentions the same meaning:

> {**For them there is the glad tiding of happiness in the life of this world and in the life to come**}**.** (Yunus 10: 64)

Therefore, a believer should thank Allah for the difference that people thought he/she made in their lives. Yet, he/she should not forget their own flaws.



Chapter Four

Provision for Soul

Towards an Interactive Recitation of the Qur'an

By Khurram Murad

Reading the Qur'an, the *tilawah*, must involve your whole 'person'. Only thus will you be able to elevate your encounter with the Qur'an to the level where you can be called a 'true' believer in the Qur'an (Al-Baqarah 2: 121).



Dynamic of Inner Participation

You should understand the dynamic of inner participation well. For how is your heart seized by Truth? First, you come to know the truth. Second, you recognize and accept it as the truth and as relevant to your life. Third, you remember the truth, as much and as often as you can. Fourth, you absorb it until it soaks into the deepest recesses of your inner self. The truth thus becomes an ever-alive state of consciousness, an enduring posture of the heart. Once a truth so permeates your inner world, it must pour out in the world of words and deeds.

It is also important to remember here that what you do outwardly, by your tongue and limbs, interacts with what you are inwardly. It is possible that words and deeds may be false witnesses to the state of

inner self. But an inner state, like faith, must necessarily find expression in words and deeds, which, in turn, must help in engraving your knowledge in your consciousness and turn it into an abiding condition.

The steps suggested in this series will be effective if you remain mindful of the above dynamics and follow the above principles.

States of Consciousness

There are seven states of consciousness which you must try to develop by remembering certain things, absorbing them and by frequently reminding yourself of them.

The Qur'anic Criteria of Inner Participation

First: Say to yourself: My Qur'an reading will not be truly *tilawah* (recitation) unless my inner self participates in it as Allah Almighty desires it to participate.

So what does Allah Almighty desire? And how should you receive the Qur'an? The Qur'an itself in many places tells you vividly how it was received by the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and by his Companions, and by those whose hearts were gripped by it. Such Qur'anic verses you should try to remember, and, then, recollect and reflect upon them whenever you read the Qur'an. Some of these are:

{Those only are believers who, when Allah is mentioned, their hearts tremble; and when His verses are recited to them, they increase them in faith.} (Al-Anfal 8: 2).

{Allah has sent down the best discourse as a Book, fully consistent within itself, oft-repeated, whereat shiver the skins of those who fear their Lord; then their skins and hearts soften to the remembrance of Allah.} (Az-Zumar 39: 23).

{When it is recited to them, they fall down upon their faces, prostrating, and say: Glory be to our Lord! Our Lord's promise is fulfilled. And they fall down upon their faces, weeping; and it increases them in humility.} (Al-Israa' 17: 107-9).

{Whenever the verses of the Most-merciful are read unto them, they fall down, prostrating themselves and weeping.} (Maryam 19: 58).

{And when they hear what has been sent down to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflow with tears because of what they have recognized of Truth. They cry: Our Lord! We believe; so You do write us down among the witnesses [to the Truth].} (Al-Ma'idah 5: 83) .

In Allah's Presence

Second: Say to yourself: I am in Allah's presence; He is seeing me.

You must remain alive to the reality that, while you are reading the Qur'an, you are in the very presence of Him who has sent these words to you. For, Allah is always with you, wherever you are, whatever you are doing. His knowledge is all encompassing.

How do you attain this state of consciousness? Listen to what Allah tells you in the Qur'an in this regard. Remember those verses, and recollect and reflect upon them when you are about to start reading the Qur'an, and during it. But what will help you more, not only in reading the Qur'an but in living your whole life by the Qur'an, is to remember and reflect this reality as often as you can. Alone or in company, silent or speaking, at home or at work, at rest or busy say, silently or loudly: He is with me, seeing and hearing, knowing and recording. And remember these verses of the Qur'an:

> {**He is with you wherever you are.**} (Al-Hadid 57: 4)
>
> {**We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.**} (Qaf 50: 16)
>
> {**Three men converse not secretly together, but He is the fourth of them, neither five men, but He is the sixth of them, neither fewer than that, neither more, but He is with them, wherever they may be.**} (Al-Mujadalah 58: 7).
>
> {**I am with you two [Musa and Harun], hearing and seeing**} (Taha 20: 46).
>
> {**Surely you are before Our eyes.**} (At-Tur 52: 48).

{**Surely it is We who bring the dead to life and write down what they have sent ahead and what they have left behind, everything We have taken into account in a clear register.**} (Yasin 36: 12).

More significant is the following verse, which not only forcefully tells, in general, about Allah being present, seeing everything, but mentions, specifically, the act of reading the Qur'an:

{**And in whatever condition you may be, and whatever you may be reciting of the Qur'an, and whatever work you may be doing, We are witnessing when you are occupied in it. And not so much as an atom's weight on earth or in heaven is hidden from your Lord. And neither is anything smaller than that nor greater, but is recorded in a manifest book.**} (Yunus 10: 61).

So He Himself tells us: I am present when you read the Qur'an; never forget this.

Reciting the Qur'an is an act of worship. The way to attain highest excellence is worshipping Allah as the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, tells us:

"... to worship Allah as if you are seeing Him, for even if you cannot see Him with eyes, (you realize that) He sees you." (Muslim).

Additionally, remember that not only are you in His presence but that He remembers you as long as you are reading the Qur'an:

{**Remember Me and I will remember you.**} (Al-Baqarah 2: 152).

The best way to remember Allah, undoubtedly, is to read the Qur'an.

Hearing from Allah

Third: Say to yourself: I am hearing from Allah.

As a part of your effort to involve your inner self, you should try to think as if you are hearing the Qur'an from the Sender himself. The Qur'an is the speech of Allah. For, just as you cannot see Him while He is always with you, you cannot hear Him while it is He who is speaking. Let the printed words and reciter's voices therefore recede and allow yourself to move nearer to the Speaker. This feeling will be generated and greatly strengthened as your consciousness of 'being in His presence' continues to grow.



Al-Ghazali, in his *Ihya'*, tells about a person who said:

> I read the Qur'an but did not find sweetness in it. Then I read it as if I was hearing it from the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) while he was reciting it to his Companions. Then, I

> moved a stage further and read the Qur'an as if I was hearing it from Jibreel while he delivered it to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). Then Allah brought me to a further stage and I began to read it as if I was hearing it from the Speaker.

Such feeling will imbue you with a delight and sweetness that will make your inner self fully enveloped by the Qur'an.

Allah's Direct Address

Fourth: Say to yourself: Allah addresses me directly, through His Messenger, when I read the Qur'an.

No doubt the Qur'an was sent down at a specific point in history, and you have received it indirectly through persons, time and space. But the Qur'an is the word of the Ever-living Allah, it is eternally valid and it addresses every person. So let all these intermediaries recede for a while and allow yourself to read the Qur'an as if it is talking directly to you, as an individual and as a member of a collectivity, in your time. The very thought of such direct reception will keep your heart seized by what you are reading.

Every Word for You

Fifth: Say to yourself: Every word in the Qur'an is meant for me.

If the Qur'an is eternally valid, and if it is addressing you today, then you must take every message as something which is totally and urgently relevant to your life and concerns, whether it be a value or norm, a statement or piece of knowledge, a character or dialogue, a promise or a warning, a command or a prohibition.

Such understanding will make your Qur'an reading alive, dynamic and meaningful. There may be some problems in translating messages intended for persons who look so different from you into messages relevant to your person and concerns, but with sincere and right effort it should be possible.

Conversation with Allah

Sixth: Say to yourself: I am conversing with Allah when I am reading the Qur'an.

The Qur'an contains Allah's words, addressed to you and meant for you. Though those words are on your lips and inscribed on your heart, they are yet a dialogue between Allah and man, between Him and you. This dialogue takes many forms. It may be explicit or it may be implicit in the sense that a response is implied from you or Him.

How does this implicit conversation take place? A beautiful example has been given by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) in a *Hadith qudsi*:

“I have divided the Prayer (*salah*) between Me and My servant, half is for Me and half for him, and My servant shall have what he asks for.

For when the servant says [All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds}, Allah says, 'My servant has praised Me'.

When the servant says, {The Most-merciful, the Mercy-giving}, Allah says, 'My servant has extolled Me'.

When the servant says {Master of the Day of Judgement}, Allah says 'My servant has glorified Me.'

When he says, {Thee alone we worship and from Thee alone we seek help}, He says, 'This is shared by Me and My servant. He will be given what he will ask.'

When he says, {Guide us on the Straight Path, , the path of those to whom Thou hast been Gracious not of those who have incurred Thy displeasure, nor of those who have gone astray}, He says 'This is for My servant, and My servant shall have what he has asked for” (Muslim, At-Tirmidhi, Ahmad) .

You will see later how the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) used to respond with words to the message and content of various verses. Remaining conscious of thus conversing with your Creator and Master will impart an extraordinary quality of intensity and depth to your Qur'an reading.

Trusting and Expecting Allah's Rewards

Seventh: Say to yourself: Allah will surely give me all the rewards He has promised me through His Messenger for reading the Qur'an and following it.

Many rewards are promised in the Qur'an. Assured are the spiritual gifts in life, such as guidance, mercy, knowledge, wisdom, healing, remembrance and light, as well as worldly favours such as honour and dignity, well-being and prosperity, success and victory. Eternal blessings such as forgiveness (*maghfirah*), Paradise (*Jannah*) and Allah's good pleasure (*ridwan*), too, are reserved for the followers of the Qur'an.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) has told about many more rewards. Take any standard Hadith collection like Bukhari, Muslim, Mishkat or Riyad As-Salihin, read the relevant chapters concerning the Qur'an, and you will find them there. Some of them you will find in this book as well, especially at the end.

For example:

> **“The best among you is the one who learns the Qur'an and teaches it”**(Bukhari).
>
> **“Read the Qur'an, for on the Day of Resurrection it will come interceding for its companions”** (Muslim).
>
> **“On the Day of Resurrection, the companion of the Qur'an will be told: Read the Qur'an and ascend (in ranks, and recite**

(the Qur'an) as you used to do in the world for you will reach your (highest) rank at the last verse you read" (Abd Dawud).

"Whoever reads one letter of the Qur'an shall receive a *hasanah*, i.e. a good deed, [that will be multiplied to become] equal to ten similar *hasanat* (good deeds)" (At-Tirmidhi)

Store as many of these promises as you can in your memory and recollect whatever you find relevant, whenever you can. Trust, expect, and seek from Allah their fulfillment in your case.

Observance of such a measure, out of belief in Allah and seeking His reward, greatly enhances the inner value of your deeds. One Hadith tells that there are forty virtues. If a person performs any of these, hoping for the reward and trusting in the promise, Allah will admit him to Paradise; the highest of these virtues is as little as making a gift of some milk to one's neighbour (Al-Bukhari).

Taken with slight modifications from the Author's ***Way to The Qur'an***

Sustained Awareness of Allah

By Khurram Murad



How can you remember Allah the Almighty throughout the normal course of your day without withdrawing from the routine of your daily worldly life?

How can you ensure that your personal life, family life, professional life and other activities all continue in full swing, and yet, at the same time, ensure that your life as a whole - every moment of it - is permeated with remembrance of Allah?

Such an all-pervading *dhikr* can be an onerous task, but one you can accomplish - with some ease. Let me remind you of four states of consciousness that you must strive to develop by remembering certain things, absorbing them and reminding yourself of them often.

ONE: Say to yourself: I am in Allah's presence; He is watching me. If ever you are alone, He is the second and that if you are two, He is the third. He is with you wherever you are. (Al-Mujadillah 58: 7) And He is nearer to you than your-jugular vein. (Qaff 50: 16-18)

He is watching everything that you do and hearing everything that you say. His knowledge is all encompassing.

Remind yourself of this as often as you can, and throughout the day- every time you begin a new task, and every time you speak. Indeed, your aim should be to impress this on your heart in such a way that it ultimately becomes your very breath.

When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was asked by a Companion about the best method of purifying himself, he replied:

> **"You should always remember that Allah is with you wherever you are."**(At-Tirmidhi)

TWO: Say to yourself: Everything I have has been given to me by Allah.

All that there is - surrounding you, on you and in you - comes from Allah alone. **There is none that creates or gives anything but Allah.** (An-Nahl 16: 78) Therefore, reflect upon all the *baraka* or blessing that He has created you with and be thankful to Him.

In all the *adhkar* that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has taught us, *hamd* or gratefulness to Allah is a constant theme. Many of these *adhkar*are simple to learn, and indeed, it was the most simple of his *adhkar* that he used most frequently.

When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) rose in the morning, he would say *al-hamdulillah*; whenever he ate or drank he would say *al-hamdulillah*; and even when he relieved himself he would give thanks to Allah.

Learn as many of the *adhkar* as you can, and throughout the day, as you witness all that Allah has blessed you with, punctuate your day with these *adhkar*.

If ever you appear to be short of things to be thankful for, recall the *hadith* of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him):

> **"There are three hundred and sixty joints in the body and for each joint you must give a*sadaqah* [thanks or optional charity] each day."**(Al-Bukhari)

You must give a *sadaqah* for each one of them because without any one of them you will be incomplete and handicapped. You must do this on a daily basis for should any one of them become damaged one day, you will similarly become incapacitated.

Additionally, you may remind yourself that, as we now know from our knowledge of human physiology, your heart beats seventy two times a minute. Every time it beats, it does so with the permission of Allah. The moment He withdraws that permission, the heart will stop beating and your life will certainly come to an end. If you feel that there is nothing else to thank Allah for, then thank him for the life that He has given you - for, so long as there is life, there is hope.



THREE: Say to yourself: Nothing in this world can happen without His permission.

Say to yourself: I am going to return to Allah one day and that day could be today. Everything lies in the hands of Allah. No harm can befall you and no benefit can reach you except as Allah ordains. It is as the Qur'an informs us:

> **{If Allah should touch you with misfortune, none can remove it but He, and if He should touch you with good fortune, He has power over all things. He alone holds sway over His creatures; He is the All-wise, the All-aware.}** (Al-An`am 6: 17-18.)

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would supplicate to Allah the Almighty after each Prayer:

> **"O Allah, whatever You want to give me, no one can stop it from coming to me and whatever You want to prevent from coming to me, nobody can give to me."**

Prayer after Prayer, you should recite these beautiful words. And beyond that, remind yourself as much as you can and throughout the day, especially as you expect something to happen, or not to happen, that everything happens only as He commands, and by His permission.

FOUR: Say to yourself: I am going to return to Allah one day and that day could be today.

You do not know when you will leave this world. It may be that the coming morning is your last morning, or perhaps the coming evening is your last evening. Indeed, it may be that this hour is your last hour, or even, that this moment is your last moment.

Such an uncertainty does not, of course, justify a complete withdrawal from this life so as to prepare for the Next in some monastic fashion. It is important, however, that you are always conscious of this uncertainty, to the extent that it motivates you to spend every moment of your remaining life seriously, considering it as a gift from Allah and spending the resources He has blessed you with - time, ability and energy - as He has advised.

Then, and only then, will your life have achieved what is required of it, and your return will achieve what is required of it. To help you attain this state of consciousness, recall and reflect upon the following Qur'anic verse as much as you can and throughout the day:**{To Allah We belong, and to Him is our return.}** (Al-Baqarah 2:156)

These are the four states of consciousness that can help us achieve a life completely devoted to the remembrance of Allah the Almighty. To try to reach these four states simultaneously, and with sincerity, can only purify you. To try in a determined fashion to reach these four states will lead you inevitably to Paradise.

Taken with slight modifications from the book: "In the Early Hours: Reflections on Spiritual and Self"

Prayer Is Better Than Sleep

By Idris Tawfiq

When young Muslims meet others for the first time and find out that they are Muslim, often one of the very first questions they ask each other is, "Do you pray?" It's as if this is their touchstone to see if the person they have met is a real Muslim or not. Calling yourself Muslim is one thing, being a Muslim is something else.



Praying five times a day is at the heart of Islam. It is one of the things that distinguishes a Muslim from everyone else in the world; that all the activities of life can be made significant by the cycle of prayer and praise which we offer to Almighty Allah. So why, then, do we have such a problem being faithful to prayer?

My first `Umrah was one of the most important experiences of my life and it had its effects on me. Being so close to the Ka`bah was a deeply moving experience. Being at the very place where our beloved Prophet

(peace and blessings be upon him), like all the prophets before him, had walked and prayed, was amazing.

One of the things that hit me most about being in Makkah, amongst so many others, was when the call to Prayer sounded for Fajr, the Dawn Prayer. Thousands of people appeared from every direction and headed towards the Ka`bah for prayer.

Getting up in the middle of the night wasn't difficult at all, because the experience of praying at the Ka`bah was so moving. At the time, moving with the vast crowd, I couldn't help thinking about what it is usually like back home.

Those getting up and going to the mosque for the Dawn Prayer are certainly a minority, aren't they? Away from Makkah, it is all too easy to ignore the Adhan completely and stay in the comfort of one's bed.

At special times like Ramadan, or when we go on pilgrimage, it seems so much easier to be faithful to prayer and to take Islam so much more seriously. How many of us, for example, attended Tarawih Prayers in the mosque during Ramadan, even though we might occasionally miss one or two of the obligatory prayers?

It's one of life's paradoxes that we want so much to be good, and yet we find ourselves falling into the same old traps and doing things we later regret.

How odd we are as human beings! We can quite happily sit in front of the television for hours or sit idly chatting on the internet to no one in particular, yet we can't manage to set aside ten minutes to pray.

We do pray, of course, when we want something. Prayer is no problem for us at all then. It comes quite naturally and is no inconvenience at all. The minute a plane begins to plummet to the ground because of engine failure, even the least religious person on board raises his hands in prayer. When a loved one is diagnosed with a serious illness or when we desperately want an interview to go well, we pray.

The Words of the Adhan

The very words of the Adhan call us to prayer and to security. There is no greater security than knowing that we are in the presence of Allah, Who controls all things. We fret so much and we waste so much time worrying about what might happen, when Allah is guiding everything and we have nothing to fear.

How beautiful it is, for example, to get up in the middle of the night, when all is still and calm, and to prostrate ourselves in prayer before the Maker of the Heavens and the Earth. No one else is around and we can be completely ourselves before Him, pouring out our hearts, asking, begging, and thanking.

If we want something from a friend, we have to couch our request with explanations: "Can I borrow such and such because…". With Allah we need no explanations. He knows more about what we need than we know ourselves. All we need to do is to bow down in prayer. The very movement of the prayers is relaxing to our bodies and it helps us to put our lives into the proper context. In the presence of such greatness, life is very fragile.

For Muslims, the call to Prayer is like an air raid siren. In times of war or danger, an air raid siren will sound to tell the citizens to run and take cover. No one thinks twice about doing so. The siren sounds and you run as fast as your legs can carry you to a place of safety.

The Adhan is just the same, but it is calling us to escape, not from bombs falling from the sky, but from the everyday concerns and worries of life which often threaten to crush us. It calls us, instead, to take shelter in Allah alone, Who knows us and cares for us and Who wants the best for us. How quickly we should rush to prayer, taking refuge in Allah. How quickly we should leave the inconsequential things of life and turn in prayer to life's Creator.

We have all seen old people in the mosque and been deeply touched by this old man or that old lady who spends so much time in prayer. Praying has made a difference to them.

It is very moving, too, to see a man come into the mosque from the street, straight from his work which is both back breaking and hard, and to see him prostrate himself in prayer, praying, perhaps, for his children or for the money he needs just to make ends meet. With our foreheads touching the ground, we are all equal. There is no pretending when we pray.

Who Should We Thank, and How?

We are truly blessed as Muslims. Allah has given us everything we need to live a good life, which will bring us happiness. The five pillars of Islam guide us to Paradise.

The five daily prayers are a way of giving meaning to our lives and of setting aside just a few minutes each day to return thanks for all we have. Every Ramadan we make lots of resolutions about how we are going to improve. The greatest resolution of all is to be faithful to prayer.

All our talk about Muslims and about Islam is worthless if we don't ground it in prayer. Being faithful to the five daily prayers changes us for the better.

Better than watching TV, better than chatting on the Internet, prayer on a regular basis re-charges our spiritual batteries and makes us feel good.

What's more, regular prayer makes us better people, better Muslims, since its effects stay with us for the rest of the day. In the words of the Adhan which call us to get out of bed and to pray Fajr, the Dawn Prayer, "Prayer is better than sleep."

Huge Reward for Small Acts: Why?

By Muhammad Fathi

A good number of the Prophet's *hadiths* promises huge rewards for seemingly small acts of worship. For example, in one *hadith* the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) tells us that reciting surat Al-Ikhlas is equal to reciting one third of the Qur'an, that is, you can earn the reward of reciting the whole Qur'an in just 5 minutes.



Amazing, is not it?!

Some people think that these "offers" are too good to be true. They are skeptic about the authenticity of these *hadiths* and believe that such "disproportion" of reward to acts cannot be stated by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him).

It is true that some reports about the advantages of certain acts is discredited by *hadith* scholars as unauthentic *hadiths*, yet many other *hadiths* are authentic. The above *hadith* about surat Al-Ikhlas is reported by Al-Bukhari.

So, how to explain such highly-rewarding "special offers"?

One way to answer this question is to reflect on the characteristics of people who are keen on seizing these opportunities; such qualities that prompt them to take seriously these chances:

Unshakeable Trust:

These *hasant* hunters have great trust in what Allah and the Prophet say and promise.

The amount of reward granted for some small deeds may appear to be disproportionately huge, but once the source of these grants is verified; when it is established that the Prophet has indeed made those statements; that is enough for true believers to dispel any doubts and remove any skepticism.

Such trust reveals a high level of faith and belief in Allah and His Prophet. Besides, this trust is not a mere claim. It is proved by action; by enthusiasm to take advantage of those special offers constantly.

Good hope in Allah

Another relevant quality is that these believers think well of Allah (*Husn Az-Zan billah*) which is one of the great traits in Islam.

It is interesting that in one hadith, the Prophet connects this trait with the practice of remembering Allah (*dhikr)*, which in turn, makes a great portion of the "special offers." The Prophet reports that Allah says:

"Allah says, 'I am as my servant expects Me to be, and I am with him when he remembers me. If he thinks of Me, I think of him. If he mentions Me in company, I mention him in an even better company.

When he comes closer to Me by a handspan, I come closer to him an arm's length. If he draws closer to Me by an arm's length, I draw closer by adistance of two outstretched arms nearer to him. If my servant comes to Me walking, I go to him running." (Al-Bukhari)

Full of hope in Allah's grace and aspiring to enjoy His promised prizes, devoted believers spend their time shopping for these offers and maximizing their profits.

A Special Relation with Allah

What kind of life style these smart believers have?

Let's imagine how they start their day:

At the early hours of dawn, when the rays of sun have not illuminated the roads yet, these believers wake up, overcoming the desire to sleep, head to Masjid to pray Fajr and get the reward of a whole-night vigil prayer[1].

They stay after Fajr in the Masjid for some time remembering Allah until the Duha time is due and then they will pray Duha to get a double reward: first, the reward of a perfect Hajj and `Umrah[2] and

second, the reward of giving a charity on behalf of each and every joint in their bodies[3].

Then, they are busy repeating the morning different supplications and words of *dhikr*, each of which has its own meanings, inspirations and reward.

What a beginning! How do you think a morning like this will affect the believer's behavior and attitudes during the whole day?

Doing Good to Everyone

The special offers are not only about maintaining a good relation with Allah. You can earn many *hasanat* by treating Human beings and even animals well.

A *Hasant* seeker knows that meeting people with a friendly, smiling face is a charity[4]; that a man who never did any good deed will enter Paradise for removing a thorny branch from the road[5], and that a prostitute was forgiven because she provided water for a thirsty dog[6].

With such positive spirit these dedicated believers live, spreading peace and goodness on earth and working diligently to make the world a better place.

Hereafter is the First Priority

In the hustle and bustle of life it is very easy to get distracted from the Hereafter and to forget preparing for it.

Work, study, kids, business, TV shows, money, entertainment and many other things have captivated the hearts and minds of a lot of people and kept their eyes and attention away from the ultimate end.

Smart believers, on the other hand, are always alert to theses traps. They are well-aware of the reality of this *dunya*: a mere passage to the Hereafter; a test whose results determines one's destination on the Day of Judgment.

Therefore, they prefer the Hereafter to this world. They are ready to sacrifice some conveniences of the *dunia* (for example, driving in freezing weather to pray Fajr at the Masjid to get the reward mentioned in the previous section) to secure themselves in the Hereafter.

Think of how much effort and concentration we dedicate to our private business to see the difference in priorities. Compare our attitude to these special offers with our excessive interest in worldly offers, credit card points, bank accounts, market sales and promotions.

In one hadith the Prophet tells us that praying twelve *nafl* (optional) *rak`ahs* daily gains you a house in Al-Jannah.[7] Think about it: do you take this offer seriously? Will you show the same interest if the offer was about getting a house in this Dunya, say in the best neighborhood in your country, in return for a 30-minute work?

Indeed those small deeds betray the magnitude of our Iman and devotion and perhaps this is why their reward is such huge.

Immune from *Ghaflah* (heedlessness)

The above focus on the hereafter and wise priority-setting is the fruit of immunity from *ghaflah* or heedlessness.

In many verses, the Qur'an warns against this disastrous malady as one of the reasons of human's loss (Al-A`raf 7:179, An-Nahl 16: 108, Al-Mu'minun 23:54-56)

Being safe from heedlessness and staying focused on and alert to what brings you closer to Allah is not an easy task, albeit not impossible too.

To appreciate this quality, let’s refer to the example mentioned at the beginning of this article: many of us know that reading Surat Al-Ikhlas gains its reader a reward equal to reciting one third of the Qur’an. But how many of us show enough interest in getting this high reward?

It is *Ghaflah* that hold us back from appreciating and gaining this special offer.

In conclusion, it is important to review our attitude towards these generous offers and take them seriously. Life is so short and none of us is guaranteed to end up in Jannah.

One point to mention here: The above reflections are just an attempt to understand the secret behind the promised great rewards. However, it is better to busy oneself with seizing these generous offers and accumulating as many of *hasanat* as possible rather than spending much time thinking why such huge *hasant* are assigned to theses deeds.

That does not mean reflecting on this question is blameworthy. The point is that it should not distract us from benefiting from the blessings that Allah granted us in the form of highly rewarding small acts.

On the Day of Judgment, one *hasanah* makes a difference. Ultimate success or loss may depend on one of these small acts.

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[1] `Uthman ibn `Affan reported that the Prophet said: "**He who observed the `Ishaa' prayer in congregation, it was as if he prayed up to the midnight, and he who prayed the morning prayer in congregation, it was as if he prayed the whole night.**" (Muslim)

[2] Anas ibn Malik narrated that the Prophet said: "**Whoever prays Fajr Prayer in congregation, and then sits and remembers Allah until the sun rises, then (after a while) prays two *rak*`has, he will gain a reward equal to that of making perfect Hajj and `Umrah.** [The Prophet repeated the word "perfect" thrice.] (At-Tirmidhi)

[3] Abu Dharr reported that the Prophet said: "**In the morning, charity is due from every bone in the body of every one of you. Every utterance of Allah's glorification (*tasbeeh*) is an act of charity. Every utterance of praise of Him (*tahmeed*) is an act of charity, every utterance of profession of His Oneness (*tahleel*) is an act of charity,**



every utterance of profession of His Greatness (*takbeer*) is an act of charity, enjoining good is an act of charity, forbidding what is disreputable is an act of charity, and two *rak`ahs* which one prays in the forenoon will suffice."

[4] Abu Dharr also reported that the Prophet said: **"Smiling in the face of your brother is counted for you as a charity"** (at-Tirmidhi and authenticated by Al-Albani)

[5] Abu Hurayrah narrated that the Prophet said: "A **man never did a good deed but removed a thorny branch from the road; it was either in a tree and he cut and threw it away, or it was lying in it and he removed it. Allah appreciated this deed of his and, therefore, brought him into Paradise."** (Abu Dawud and authenticated by Al-Albani)

[6] Abu Huraira reported that Allah's Messenger said: "**While a dog was moving around a well and was about to die of thirst, a prostitute from the children of Israel happened to see it, so, she removed her shoe, drew water in it and made the dog drink. She was forgiven (by Allah) because of this.**" (Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

[7] Umm Habiba, the wife of the Messenger of Allah reported that he said: "**If any Muslim servant (of Allah) prays for the sake of Allah twelve supererogatory*rak`ahs*, apart from the obligatory ones, every day, Allah will build for him a house in Paradise.**" or "**a house will be built for him in Paradise**" (Muslim)